

A learning tool for students of the UW-Madison Odyssey Project

Odyssey ORACLE

Special Edition Oracle

Encouragement and support for the second semester of the Odyssey program

Welcome Back!

www.odyssey.wisc.edu

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Year 5 No. 9 January 16, 2008

Making the Case for Semester Two

Odyssey students were asked to describe themselves halfway through the course and their reasons for wanting to continue the journey.

Here are excerpts from their eloquent answers.

Being a part of this year's Odyssey class has changed me. The way I think and look at the world has changed. I just hope that next semester I will be able to be more involved in the discussions that we have in class. I'm starting to feel like I'm the only one who does not

get involved in discussions, and I want to; it's just that I'm too shy. I'm looking forward to next semester.

(Nosihle Lukhele)

I would love to say that I have gotten all I need out of the first semester that could further my education, but that would be a lie. I have a long way to go. . . .

I know that I have trust issues when it comes to adults. Throughout my life, I have had the misfortune of trusting people, and they stomped all over me. I also need to pick up some social skills. I have been invited to so many places, and I reject them not because I'm not interested but because I don't have the skills of just chit chatting. I continue to be in the cave I have placed myself in.

Well, that all ends come January 16, 2008. I have to release the real Brenda within me. She so wants to come out. Get





ready, Odyssey Class of 2008: meet Brenda Tompkins, the go getter!

I will be able to make this transformation because of you guys, the guests, and the Odyssey staff. I have never felt so much love and support in my entire life. You make me believe that I can accomplish anything I set my mind to.

(Brenda Tompkins)

Wow! I definitely feel that word sums up how I feel about semester one. . . . I have learned about authors that I never knew, understood words that always bewildered me and words that I could not pronounce, gained a family outside of my own which I did not think was possible, and, most importantly, realized that obtaining a college degree is actually feasible. This class forces me to tap into that part of me that I have put on the back burner for so long, the piece of me that has always seen herself graduating from college and having a career



but just didn't know how to go about it. I have wonderful professors, excellent resources, and a class full of people on the same journey as me. I am looking forward to the second semester; it will actually be bittersweet for me knowing that once we start the second semester we will be closer to the end.

(Sheriah Quarthey)

When I started this class, I could not imagine the magic that would occur every week in our classroom at the Harambee Center. We have formed our own mini-community of people sharing the same experiences. I would love to continue my journey because I feel as if I have only just begun. I like seeing how 31 people can be assigned the same readings and assignments and still come away with something different. I love the back and forth dialogue that we have in our class that sometimes takes us off track but is still valuable. I have not had much to



say in class yet, but I know that my time is coming.

(Mandisa Hayes)

My levels of confidence and joy are much higher. I am resolved to continue toward a degree that will enable me to be either a teacher or counselor. I've learned that first impressions are just that; Einsteins come in all shapes,



genders, heights, and colors. I am very happy to be a part of Odyssey. My classmates are an encouragement to me, and from them I derive enthusiasm to continue and to compete.

(Kevin Schoen)

I like to read and will read just about anything that will hold my interest. I like to read books that I can make a connection with in life and believe we can learn from books of fiction as well as non-fiction. I would like to continue on this journey because I am learning new things about myself and, most importantly, I am gaining knowledge of things I failed to access before, such as art, history, and philosophy. Mostly I really enjoy the professors that give their time to individuals such as me that are not fortunate enough to pay for an education of higher learning. I owe it to myself to see this journey to the end . . . and I promised this very nice little lady with a very big heart that I would

do my best in class and not quit.
(Jeffery McCarroll)

In describing myself now, I would have to say physically I'm pretty much the same; however, mentally I'm totally different. My entire perspective has changed; my goal has changed. For me, that's incredible! . . . Now (prepare yourself) I want initials behind my name. How does René Robinson, Ph.D., sound? I've even made a plan B, which is René Robinson, M.S.; I'll be satisfied either way. Can you believe it? And the frightening aspect is I want to do it at the University of Wisconsin; not an easy task from what I hear, but neither am I.

Knowing has become my new driving mechanism. I want to know! I want to know A LOT!! I don't want Mary Sue or Tammy to tell me; I want to know for myself. I want to read; I want to look things up. I'm actually becoming a "Google Queen"! . . .

I want to continue this journey

because knowledge works for me; it completes me. I don't fret about being lonely and sad anymore.

I'm not mad because none of my favorite shows are on television or because I don't have time to sit in front of my computer and play games. I have knowledge to look forward to! I can read a book! (Ha!) Now that just cracks me up!!! Last year this time, you could not have paid me enough to sit still long enough to read a book! Now I look forward to it! Thank you, Odyssey!!!! I'm on my way!

(René Robinson)

Since the first day I started this class, I've gradually begun to change. Each and every class is different, and I'm learning things I've never thought about before. I have become a better reader and a better writer, and I understand the importance and the value of a college education.

(Albert Watson)

I came into this program with a





series of failed credit attempts as my recent academic experience. I set a goal for myself to miss zero classes and zero homework. I have met that goal. . . . I want to continue in the Odyssey Program first and foremost because I love coming here every week! It feels like a springboard to my hopes and dreams. Every week, every conversation is a bounce forward towards a degree that I've known I wanted for eight years with almost no progress in actually receiving it. That feels huge!
(Tara Wilhelmi)

Now I would describe myself as *changed*. My eyes have been opened to a whole new world. So far this Odyssey that I am on has made me more aware of the endless possibilities there are with an education. I now find myself interested in reading more than just what interests me... Every Wednesday, thanks to my professors, classmates, and



the thick ambience of love, I am encouraged.
(Ronnie Jones)

Enrolling in the Odyssey Project has helped instill me with pride. It has allowed me to receive the emotional support and technical guidance necessary for me to attend the University in conjunction with Odyssey. After



being the only spot on campus, it is spiritually rewarding to be in a room full of my contemporaries. Participating in class while interacting with mentors has helped me to overcome an inherent shyness. As a result, I expand this confidence on the university campus by believing I am representing Odyssey, not just myself. With Odyssey, I have renewed expectations that still require great courage.
(Tom Gardner)

When the program started, I was scared and naive. . . . I can imagine that I was in the cave before, and now I am out of the cave. . . . After the program is over, I would like to work with students who have similar challenges. I think the journey next semester will not end. I would like to pursue school to get my doctorate degree one day. That will take money, effort, and much more time. There is a long way to go.
(Naomi Kharrazihassani)





This has been a remarkable journey from the beginning. When I received the letter stating I had been accepted, I wasn't sure what to expect. . . . I can say with much gratitude and great appreciation if it had not been for Emily Auerbach, Coach Marshall Cook, and Diane Dennis giving a push to myself and others like me, I'm not sure I would have made it to the next level. Just the support and the determination of my fellow classmates and the camaraderie we have together as a class has changed the dynamics of my personal situation. I crave school each and every Wednesday; my life has new meaning to it with the Odyssey Project. My present goal is to successfully finish the Odyssey Project and further my education, hopefully through the University of Wisconsin.

(Rosalyn 'RJ' Jones-Knight)

I describe myself and my interests now as that of great



rebirth, growth, and change. Skeptical, secret, safe, silent sorrow scattered in the circles of my mind is no longer there, and now those once lost hopes, goals, and dreams are like overflowing seeds richly sprouting forth green and alive from once dormant, barren, dried out land. Reaching, believing, and touching the growth of flowers, I now shadow dance in a garden of precious, plentiful, planted Odyssey. . . . I behold great love and acceptance in my Odyssey family as I trust, grow, change, learn, misunderstand, cry, laugh, succeed, fall, and then get helped right back up again. Sometimes I pinch and squeeze myself real tight because it all seems too good to be truth that this Odyssey isn't a dream I am sleeping through.

(Sherri Bester)

When I first applied to the Odyssey Project, I wanted to re-educate myself, find new purpose in life, and overcome the fear of



going back to school. Today I am excited about the new knowledge I have acquired.

My interests now are in pursuing more education in order to open up new doors and unlimited possibilities. By re-educating myself, I feel that I can make more of an impact on society and use what I've learned to help others.

Second semester might be the time I would find that voice I was looking for all of my life. I've also become part of a greater whole, a family. To me, there would be no greater joy than for all of us to graduate together.

My world has changed so much since entering Odyssey. I'm eager to find this stranger who lurks inside me, who wants so much more out of life than merely to exist.

(John Shields)

The Odyssey Project has made me realize dreams can come true; it all depends on how badly you want it. Not too long ago, I began



to give up on my dreams. My dreams were so far off, I couldn't reach them, and my motivation was gone. To continue my education was a distant memory. The Odyssey Project has lit a fire under me. . . . I want to continue with this journey. There's so much more to learn and talk about. I look forward to coming to class each and every week. The Odyssey Project is preparing me for my new journey.
(**Jack Crawford**)

I don't feel lost now. I have a purpose: to educate myself, to break from the manacles binding my mind. I see a bit clearer, but I know there is so much more! I have to see, I have to know how far I can go with this.

I know I'm more confident and intelligent than I thought. My interests are to put 110% into the Odyssey Project . . . and graduate in May with every single one of my classmates.

My interests now are studying, wasting less time on trivial



things, and reading the paper if I can't get to a computer or my books. I'm a philosopher in training. I fantasize about planning to take philosophy and literature courses after Odyssey. I feel better about my writing and grammar.
(**Severn Anderson**)

I am still interested in teaching



and counseling people with disabilities and their families. I learned a lot from the students in our class and their individual life experiences. I may also receive a degree in History, Literature, and/or Art History, tutor students who are dyslexic, and teach Orton-Gillingham, a multi-sensory way of learning how to read.
(**Debby Loftsgordon**)

I love coming to class, even when I'm having a bad day and feel like I just want to go home and get out of the cold, cruel world. It always makes me feel better and, no matter what, at the end of the class I leave with a good feeling. I have so much to learn and hope to continue my education after this year. I tell everyone, whether they want to hear about the project or not, how wonderful it is and how I feel so BLESSED to have been accepted to be a part of the class. Some of my friends say they can see how happy I have become since starting this class. My son tells me he hopes to be



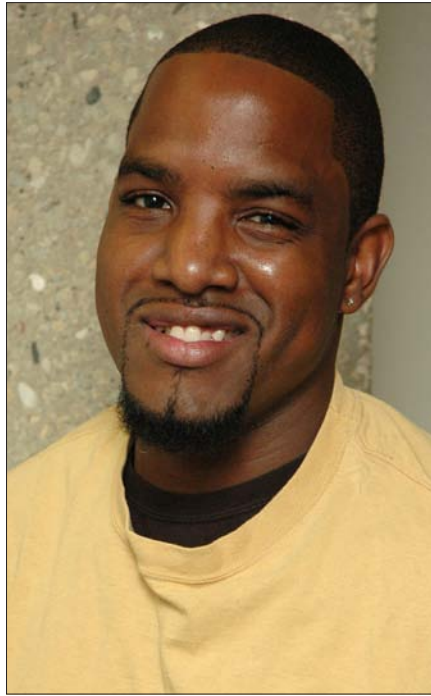
able to join the Odyssey Project next year. This has been one of the best things that has happened for me! This class is such an encouragement and self-esteem builder. I wish I knew a way to make this more than one year. But I'll take the year with great pride.

(Candy Gonzalez)

Wow! I cannot believe that second semester is approaching. I am very proud of myself for making it this far while excelling in my studies, and I plan to do the same during second semester. I am still the same person I was before, except now I am more informed and educated than before. I believe my goal was to go to the University of Wisconsin and finish the nursing program. Now my goal is to become either a nurse or a lawyer, and I will work hard to achieve my goals.

(Josephine Lorya)

I would love to continue this journey second semester, but I



must also get my work done in a timely manner. I vow to not only attend every class second semester but also have my work done when I arrive. This class and program is something that I need to take full advantage of, and it's time for me to step up in the clutch.

(Charrod Miller)

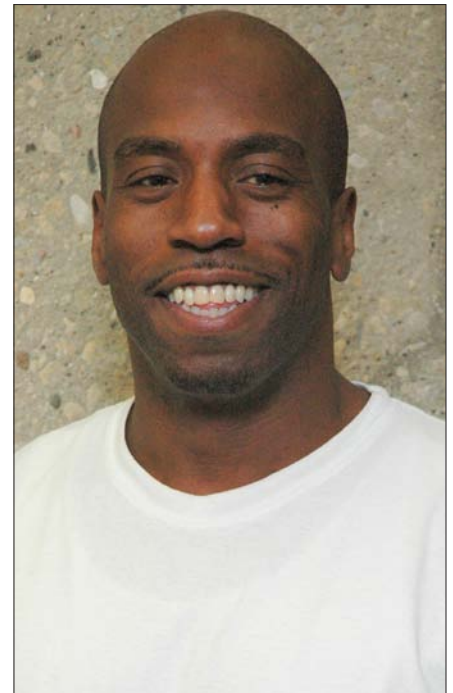
I want to continue the journey but this time with my blinders off. I have been blind to my vulnerabilities ... I grew up believing that I had to be strong when I felt weak and to never ask for help. It's taken me so long to not feel so ashamed when I need help. I still need to work on my writing, grammar and spelling. However, I also need to witness my classmates blossom because we are a source of strength for each other.

(Ivonne Ramos)

First semester I wasn't quite sure how things would go. I hadn't completed anything. I'm so happy I stuck with it, got to meet new people, and learned I could do what we're trying to do in this class. Next semester I'm going to be more serious. The Odyssey Project showed me I can accomplish my dreams.

(Dwayne Blue)

I feel I'm a phenomenal woman.





I've grown so much since I've started. I have my ups and downs, but it's all a learning process. I've enjoyed all of the readings. My work may not be perfect but I do my best. I'm learning to write more to get my point across. And for second semester, I'm looking forward to my class because my son looks up to me. When he sees me doing my homework, I can tell he's proud that I'm doing something to make our future better. I've enjoyed getting to know my classmates, and I look forward to what second semester brings.

(Loretta Smith)

I would describe myself as a starter, not a finisher, and a quiet, keep-to-myself person. I really pray and ask God for strength and for patience because sometimes I really find this course difficult to finish, not because I can't do the work but because I don't make the time. I'm a very smart person and am sure that if I really put my all into what I really want, I can



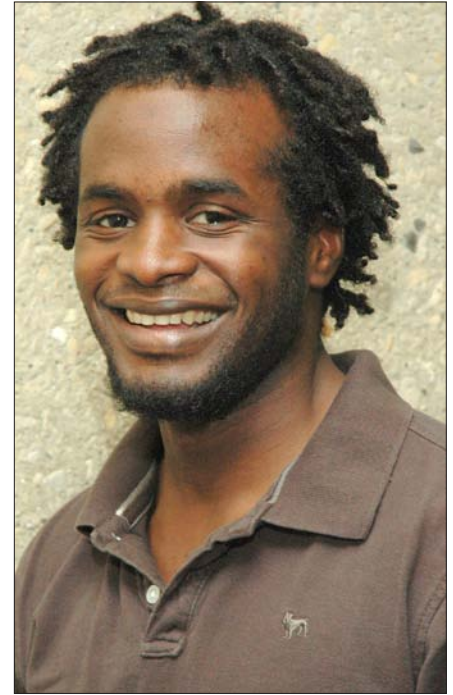
do it. But it's just so easy to put my school work aside and tend to my "normal life needs" (mother, wife, and work) rather than to really concentrate on my school work.

This class has made me realize that I actually enjoy writing but just never knew it. I write about everything. I don't like to show my writing because I feel as if I don't make sense.

To continue this journey is a must for me because I have set this up as the ultimate test, the ultimate challenge of my life. I am out to prove that I can finally finish something, and that I can set an example for my children. I have to really work hard and give my 110%. This is a journey that I'm definitely going to finish, and with all the support and encouragement of the Odyssey class, it shouldn't be hard.

(Maria Torres)

I'm more trusting of people. I started with a small family, but now I'm a member of a battalion, a tribe, a much larger family—



everyone heading toward self-improvement and happiness. I used to be shy of speaking or sharing myself with a crowd, but now I'm not nearly as guarded. I think my new phobia would be the long absence from them [my classmates]. I've learned that knowledge is not only rewarding externally or materially but also internally. I'm learning not to give up—if I fall, to dust myself off and keep running. . . .

I would like to continue next semester because I do not want to leave any grain of opportunity on my plate and because I just started to find another gear, another groove towards learning, towards discipline, towards grasping the concept of perseverance. The class is some way is my therapy, and I would love to continue.

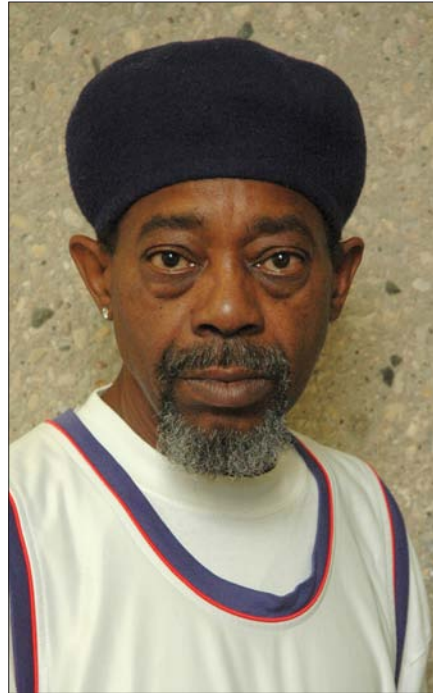
(Haroun Omar)

I am a woman full of wonderment and possibilities. I am a woman thinking, resolving, pondering.



I am a woman in fear of success and capable of sabotaging my own dreams. . . . I am a fighting woman. I am a strong woman.
(**Ozanne Anderson**)

I am a mother of two and at this point in my life this is what motivates me to struggle out of poverty of the spirit. The Odyssey Project has truly given me my



become a more educated person. This class has helped me to really focus on what is important in life. I now know that I want to make movies.

(**Justin Wilson**)

When I started this program, I was very scared and unsure about what my abilities would be in terms of the educational structure involved. As we began to complete packet after packet and the classroom discussions became less labored, I really felt like I was a member of a very special sorority/fraternity. I am a more vocal person now. I am not ashamed of who I was because that person made me who I am now. My interests include taking my education even further . . . a Master's Degree in Nursing.

My goal on how I want to continue this journey?
MOTIVATION, ASK,
BELIEVE.

I will try to keep myself motivated by reaching out to my classmates when I feel that

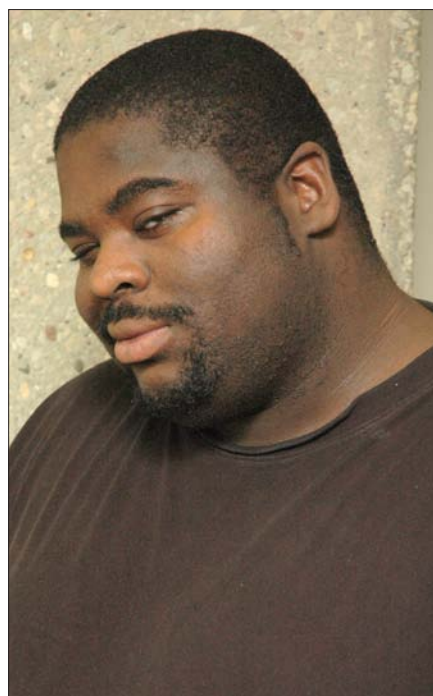
backbone in many areas of my life. . .

(**Jessica Bhan**)

I still see this class as a way to better myself, putting me on the way to be able to help myself have a better life.

(**Rockameem**)

Thanks to Odyssey, I have



shadow upon me.

I will call Emily when I am unsure about my work, or if I'm behind, or just to say hi, because sometimes that week can seem like a lifetime.

Last but not least, my motto

for second semester is going to be BELIEVE. People believed in me enough to know that I not only could get into this program but that I could complete it.

My life has been forever changed due to the Odyssey

Project, the students, and the people that had the foresight to see that something like this would work—to know that give the chance, everyone has worthwhile potential waiting to be awakened.
(Valerie Williams)



Romare Bearden's *The Conversation*